EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 June 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
18th Meeting 2002, Session 1

CONVENER

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)
*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Sally Brown (Adviser)
Lindsay Paterson (Adviser)
Malcolm MacKenzie (Adviser)

WITNESSES

Eleanor Coner (Scottish Parent Teacher Council)
Mike Doig (Headteachers Association of Scotland)
David Eaglesham (Scottish Secondary Teachers Association)
Judith Gillespie (Scottish Parent Teacher Council)
Ann Hill (Scottish School Boards Association)
Gordon Jeyes (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
George MacBride (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Shelagh Rae (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)
Angela Roger (Association of University Teachers)
John Tierney (Scottish School Boards Association)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Susan Duffy

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 11 June 2002

(*Afternoon*)

[THE DEPUTY CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:05*]

The Deputy Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good afternoon. I invite members to indicate whether they are attending the meeting as committee substitutes.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I am here as a committee substitute, representing the Labour party.

The Deputy Convener: We welcome Karen Whitefield and the committee advisers.

Item in Private

The Deputy Convener: I invite the committee to discuss item 4, on the proposed committee bill, in private. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

School Meals (Scotland) Bill

The Deputy Convener: The next item is the committee's stage 1 report on the School Meals (Scotland) Bill. Members will have an up-to-date copy of the report. We discussed this item in public last week and we are discussing it in public this week, which means that the draft report is not a private paper. The report has been redrafted since last week and we are keen to finalise it today. We would like to publish the report on Friday. That means that we must agree all amendments this afternoon, if possible. Do members want to pick up on particular points, or should we work through the report page by page?

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Let us do it page by page.

The Deputy Convener: That will save us going back and forward through the report.

Michael Russell: Are we using the copy that has just been produced, rather than any of the copies that went before?

The Deputy Convener: Yes. I hope that we are all considering the same report—we shall soon see. Let us begin at the first page.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): One Plus submitted further evidence of a survey of schoolchildren. It might be useful to include that in paragraph 7, on page 2.

The Deputy Convener: Are there any comments on pages 3 or 4?

Jackie Baillie: There is a point that Mike Russell raised that has been omitted. In paragraph 18, line 2, we decided to say "many schools". I pay attention to what Mike Russell says.

Michael Russell: I am overwhelmed by the fact that Jackie Baillie notes what I say—I am even slightly worried.

The Deputy Convener: Are there any comments on page 5?

Michael Russell: In paragraph 22, we say that we

"would ask the Scottish Executive and local authorities to discourage the availability of commercial soft drinks in schools."

I would have thought that that should go with the recommendations in paragraph 85.

The Deputy Convener: Fine. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Michael Russell: Our recommendations should also question the widespread use of vending machines. Both those points should be in our recommendations.

The Deputy Convener: Yes. Do members have any comments on page 6?

Michael Russell: In paragraph 28, it is unnecessarily sweeping to say:

"It is also deeply disappointing that the standard of nutrition is such that this debate is necessary."

Perhaps we should say that the standard of nutrition in many places is such that the debate is necessary. As the paragraph stands, it implies that the standard is poor everywhere, but that is not true, as we know.

The Deputy Convener: Absolutely. We will include the phrase "in many places". Do members have any comments on page 7?

Michael Russell: I wonder about the use of the phrase "potent weapon" in paragraph 33. It refers to one of the strategies, and although the committee agreed that it is an important strategy, I accept Tommy Sheridan's reservation that it is only one of many strategies. However, I will not go to the wall on it.

Jackie Baillie: Perhaps we should replace that phrase with the word "useful".

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Deputy Convener: Do members have any further comments on page 7?

Jackie Baillie: Yes, convener. The second half of paragraph 34 starts:

"The committee would also urge the Executive to extend the use of swipe card technology to all schools and to recognise the point made by Edinburgh City Council and extend the use in schools to help increase take up."

The point that City of Edinburgh Council was making is that the use of swipe cards has not increased uptake; therefore, we need to reword the sentence. The council talked about a whole-school approach to the use of swipe cards. The sentence needs to be tweaked, otherwise we will be pointing in two different directions simultaneously.

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Deputy Convener: Do members have any comments on page 8?

Michael Russell: Have we received notice of any different point of view from Glasgow City Council, as mentioned in paragraph 38?

Martin Verity (Clerk): No.

Michael Russell: So that was a red herring—if I may use that culinary term.

The Deputy Convener: Do members have any comments on pages 9 and 10? No. Are there any comments on page 11?

Jackie Baillie: Yes. I am slightly unsure where

"although the Committee recognises that there is no agreed definition of child poverty"

in paragraph 53 comes from. The Executive has set out a range of definitions of child poverty. Rather than use the phrase "no agreed", we should refer to a basket of definitions. Alternatively, we could remove the sentence entirely, as it does not add to anything.

Michael Russell: The paragraph works without it, because the next line says what the figure of 30 per cent is based on. The sentence in brackets should be removed.

The Deputy Convener: Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Jackie Baillie: I also ask that, after the first sentence of paragraph 54, which talks about the percentage

"of children … living in relative income poverty",

we also include the percentage of children living in absolute income poverty.

The Deputy Convener: Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Deputy Convener: Are there any comments on paragraphs 55 or 56?

Jackie Baillie: I take issue with the Executive with regard to paragraph 56—I am making a habit of this. It is true that the working families tax credit does not, to quote the Executive's letter,

"'compensate' parents for paying for school meals."

It does, however, include a calculation for meals. As such, it is available for 52 weeks of the year, not for the 38 or 36 weeks covering the school terms. The information is therefore incorrect. It is correct for child tax credit and working tax credit but, in calculating the amounts for working families tax credit, consideration is given to the cost of meals.

14:15

Michael Russell: I am not sure. If the Executive says that that is not the case—

Jackie Baillie: Is the Executive always right, Mike?

Michael Russell: No.

Jackie Baillie: Aha! I thought that Mike was going to say that it was.

Michael Russell: Having worked as Jackie Baillie's straight man for that line, I return to the important point. Unless there is a regulation to counter the Executive's claim as shown in paragraph 54 of the draft report, I would be inclined to go with the Government, which may know what it is talking about—it does not know

often, but it does sometimes.

Jackie Baillie: When we consider the calculation for how benefits are made up, working families tax credit always indicates everybody's life costs. That includes meal provision. That is how the calculation is devised. I am not going to go to the wall over this, but the wording is just inaccurate. If Mike Russell wants to be party to an inaccurate committee report, I am happy.

Michael Russell: No, I am happy to bow to the knowledge of Jackie Baillie as former Minister for Social Justice. However, the Executive says:

"neither the existing WFTC, the Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit that will be in use from April 2003 contain a specific element to 'compensate' parents for paying for school meals."

That is slightly different from what Jackie Baillie is talking about.

Jackie Baillie: It is slightly different in that parents are not compensated directly for school meals. We need, however, to ask whether a cost for meals is included in the tax credit.

Michael Russell: Could we add a few words, instead of eliminating that sentence?

Jackie Baillie: Fine. I would be happy with that.

Michael Russell: It would say something like "although there is an element of funding for meals".

Jackie Baillie: But in working families tax credit, not in the child tax credit or working tax credit.

Michael Russell: So we could just add those words.

Jackie Baillie: Yes.

The Deputy Convener: Are members happy with that?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Deputy Convener: Are there any comments about paragraphs 57, 58, 59, 60, 61 or 62, which cover equal opportunities? Turning to the part dealing with the financial memorandum, are there any comments on paragraphs 63, 64, 65, 66, 67 or 68?

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The fourth sentence of paragraph 68 begins:

"However, the Committee also recognises that if the school day were lengthened to accommodate a longer lunch hour or a staggered lunch hour".

I would rather it said "altered" instead of "lengthened".

The paragraph continues:

"then there could be costs in terms of teaching time and administrative costs".

Although that is using the word "costs" in a way that is not exactly accurate, that is fair enough, and there would indeed be effects

"in terms of teaching time and administrative costs".

I would use the word "effects" instead of "costs".

The Deputy Convener: And you want to use the word "altered" instead of "lengthened" in relation to the school day.

Ian Jenkins: Yes, because lengthening the day is only one way of altering it.

The Deputy Convener: Are there any comments on paragraph 69?

Jackie Baillie: Should the last sentence not read "may accrue from a proper targeted and resourced initiative" and not

"may accrue for a proper targeted and resources initiative"?

The Deputy Convener: Yes. Thank you, Jackie. Turning to the overall views on the bill, are there any comments on paragraphs 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78 or 79? Under subordinate legislation, are there any comments on paragraphs 80, 81, 82, 83 or 84? Turning to our recommendations, are there any comments on paragraph 85?

Michael Russell: We are adding to the recommendations.

The Deputy Convener: Where will we do that?

Michael Russell: We need to move the reference to vending machines and soft drinks in paragraph 22 to paragraph 85, as it fits there more naturally.

Jackie Baillie: We need to drop the corresponding reference between paragraphs 70 and 78.

The Deputy Convener: Do members have any comments on the first or second bullet points?

Michael Russell: I would like to make a point about the final footnote in the report. Paragraph 87 states:

"As stated in paragraph 79, the Committee is not convinced that the Bill is capable of addressing all of the complex issues of uptake, nutritional standards and child poverty as the sponsors of the Bill say it seeks to do."

However, the fact that Irene McGugan and I voted against the recommendation that the Parliament does not agree the general principles of the bill is recorded in a footnote to paragraph 88. That could be interpreted as meaning that we did not dissent from paragraph 79, which I regard as a general statement. The paragraph states that the committee

"is not convinced that the Bill is capable of addressing all of the complex issues of uptake, nutritional standards and child poverty".

I accept that the bill does not do that, because of the way in which it is drafted. However, that is not the reason why the majority of committee members have recommended that the Parliament should not agree the general principles of the bill.

Jackie Baillie: Will Michael Russell repeat what he has just said?

Michael Russell: Paragraph 87 starts with the words

"As stated in paragraph 79".

Paragraph 88 is the nub of the point to which Irene McGugan and I have dissented. Some might argue that we should have dissented to paragraph 79.

Jackie Baillie: But you did not.

Michael Russell: Yes, because I read paragraph 79 as stating logically and clearly that we are not convinced that the bill will achieve its aims. That is not the same as saying that we do not support the bill. I support the bill at stage 1, because I believe that it can be changed. My dissent is not inconsistent with paragraph 79, but only with paragraph 88. Do you see what I mean?

The Deputy Convener: Yes.

Jackie Baillie: Mike Russell is dancing on the head of a pin again.

Michael Russell: No, I am making an important point. We should delete paragraph 87, which makes a point that is already stated in paragraph 79.

Martin Verity: Could the footnote read, "On a division, Michael Russell and Irene McGugan voted against paragraph 88 of the report"?

Michael Russell: That would not change things. I would like to delete paragraph 87, which repeats what is said in paragraph 79.

The Deputy Convener: That is fine.

Jackie Baillie: Does Mike Russell still agree to paragraph 79?

Michael Russell: Yes, because it states an opinion. I agree that the bill as drafted is not capable of achieving its aims.

The Deputy Convener: Will members clarify what amendments we have agreed to make to paragraph 85?

Michael Russell: We need to move the reference to vending machines and soft drinks in paragraph 22 to the recommendations.

Ian Jenkins: The second bullet point in paragraph 85 refers to "milk" rather than "free milk".

The Deputy Convener: The bullet point states that

"milk should be made available".

Michael Russell: Our intention was that free milk should be provided.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): At our previous meeting, I made clear that I would not agree to that.

Michael Russell: Can we divide on the issue? I am strongly of the opinion that we said that free milk should be provided. Age was the only qualification on that.

Mr Monteith: As a supporter of local authority education, I believe that it should be for local authorities to decide whether to provide free milk.

Ian Jenkins: If we say that milk should be freely available, Brian Monteith can think what he likes.

Michael Russell: We should amend the report to say that free milk should be available.

The Deputy Convener: Do we agree to amend the report to state that "free milk should be available"?

Members: No.

The Deputy Convener: There will be a division.

FOR

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Convener: The result of the division is: For 6, Against 1, Abstentions 0.

Mr Monteith: That upsets me, but there we are.

Michael Russell: Brian Monteith is the natural heir and successor to Margaret Thatcher, who was the previous person to take milk away from children.

The Deputy Convener: He has a great deal to live up to.

Mr Monteith: I am surprised that Mike Russell took so long to make that point.

Michael Russell: I was working my way up to it.

Ian Jenkins: The bullet point at the top of page 17 should not be there.

Mr Monteith: I thank Ian Jenkins for raising that issue.

The Deputy Convener: I assume that in the final report all the bullet points will appear on the same page.

The report will be finalised with the amendments that we have agreed today. The stage 1 debate on the School Meals (Scotland) Bill will take place next Thursday afternoon at 3.30 pm.

Michael Russell: I move a motion of congratulations to the convener, who has guided us through a report that was more difficult than many that we have considered.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you.

Michael Russell: I presume that we will publish the report instead of launching it, because it is already in the public domain.

The Deputy Convener: Yes.

14:26

Meeting suspended.

14:28

On resuming—

Purposes of Education Inquiry

The Deputy Convener: I welcome those who have come to give evidence to us this afternoon in the first evidence-taking session for our purposes of education inquiry. Three of our advisers are present: Malcolm MacKenzie, Sally Brown and Lindsay Paterson. If they want to ask questions, they are allowed to do so. I am happy to allow the witnesses to make a short statement, if they so require. Not all the witnesses have submitted written evidence and they may want to say something. I ask the witnesses to keep it short—no more than two minutes.

George MacBride (Educational Institute of Scotland): We are happy with the written submission that we will be making and we do not want to extend on it. I have two points to make. First, we are happy that the debate is taking place and, secondly, the debate must be about evolution and not revolution. We have to build on the strong points of the current system and not seek to denigrate current practice or ask people to make a completely new start with a blank sheet of paper. That would not be a recipe for success.

14:30

David Eaglesham (Scottish Secondary Teachers Association): We have not made a written submission. The process has been problematic for us, because it is very wide-ranging. It is almost impossible for us to try to encapsulate what 8,000 people are saying on such a diverse subject area. We would have found it easier to make a submission on a specific topic and we would have been happy to do so. Nonetheless, we have been participating in the debate and I am happy to make general comments.

Mike Doig (Headteachers Association of Scotland): My own association is in a similar position, as we are continuing to receive responses from around the country. I echo what George MacBride said. We welcome change and challenge provided that they are managed. One of the difficulties that our profession has faced is that we have had to react to a series of changes that were not interlinked or connected.

We welcome the opportunity to reach, over a longer period, a clear vision on the way ahead and we look forward to change being managed by all parties working together. At times we underestimate the tremendous strength of the Scottish education system. I do not want to see change for change's sake, because that might detract from the product.

Angela Roger (Association of University Teachers): The Association of University Teachers is happy to take part in the discussions, although we recognise that the focus is on school education. Higher education has an important role to play, not least in light of the fact that teacher education institutions are now integrated into our universities. I am happy to take our brief submission as read and to respond to questions from the committee.

The Deputy Convener: We are engaged in an inquiry that is very much a visioning exercise. Rather than focus on the negative, we want to move forward positively. In that vein, I invite members to ask questions.

Jackie Baillie: I will kick off. George MacBride made an interesting point when he said that the process should "be about evolution and not revolution", and that we should build on the strengths of the current system. What are the strong points of the current system and what needs to change?

George MacBride: A major strength—I am talking about age 3 up to age 18—is the comprehensive system of education in Scotland. Whatever criticisms are made of comprehensive schools, there is no doubt that they have in general been highly successful at raising attainment during their existence in Scotland. Comprehensive schools have also contributed to narrowing the gap between the most and least successful and the most and least advantaged people, although the gap has by no means been eliminated.

Comprehensive education provides a model of the sort of society that we, as teachers and trade unionists in the EIS, wish to promote. The model is one that is marked by equity and social justice. Our schools do not achieve that model at present and a huge amount of work needs to be done in that respect. The comprehensive model is, however, one of the key strengths of the Scottish education system. I hope that we can continue to develop it in the debate that is being promoted by the committee and in the debate that is being promoted by the Executive. I wanted to highlight that key strength, because it needs to be developed to promote greater equity between socio-economic groups and to promote gender and race equality.

Jackie Baillie: I will pursue that with the panel as a whole. In the past, we measured the quality of input and considered that that would deliver us the appropriate outcome. If we switched to a mechanism that measured equality of outcome and suggested that that should be striven for, how would the education sector respond? Could that be delivered? What would you do?

George MacBride: I do not think that all inputs can be ignored—there is an element of self-interest in a teacher organisation's saying that. Several key inputs have been made to the Scottish education system. Angela Roger referred to a major input, which is the quality of teacher education and the quality assurance mechanisms that accompany that. That must be taken further. We cannot simply say, "We prepared good teachers and pushed them into schools. End of matter." We must think of inputs. The professionalism of Scottish teachers is a key input.

We must also think of the processes in educational establishments, schools and education authorities and we must consider outputs. I would regret it if we examined only inputs. However, I do not suggest that we should never examine inputs, if that was Jackie Baillie's suggestion, which it might not have been.

David Eaglesham: The question is slightly dangerous. We have become bound up in the idea of precise input and output measures and we are in danger of talking ourselves into a hole. I have noted in Scotland the terribly Calvinist attitude that we cannot become any better because we are so hauden doon and that is the way life is. If education has taken on anything in recent years, it is the upsetting of that attitude. We say, "That is not the way it is and is not the reality of life in this country." Scotland is different from other parts of the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. We must avoid involvement in that narrow debate.

We need to assert the quality of what is being delivered in education, which has been consistent for a long time. I say that at considerable risk, because at least one person in the room—the microphone operator—is a former pupil of mine. If I was an unsuccessful teacher, electronic problems could ensue—he is going to pull the plug. [*Laughter.*]

Michael Russell: This is his big chance.

David Eaglesham: He is sawing away the branch behind me.

We do not celebrate that consistent quality enough, nor do we assert that proposition enough. We tend to become bound up in measurements. The debate is good, because it allows us to raise our eyes beyond that and to say that although we must be accountable, we need not become involved in such a narrow argument.

Mike Doig: It is unfortunate that, over the years, the focus has been on academic output and youngsters' results. We have no easy mechanism by which to measure the other aspects of the education with which we provide our youngsters, if we must measure them. Are youngsters leaving school as well-rounded individuals who have a social conscience and all the attributes and skills

that we want them to have? I would hesitate to find a way in which to measure that rigidly, because we are not turning out a nation of failures. Perhaps we are not turning out people who have entrepreneurial vision; that could be developed. We could do more to develop some aspects of youngsters' education in the broadest sense, but we have the product of a history of measuring output in terms of academic results, which is not all that schools are about.

Angela Roger: If it is appropriate, I will consider the argument about access to higher education and people's opportunities to enter higher education. Universities have been delighted to open up opportunities to youngsters from diverse backgrounds and have done that successfully, but as the impetus to increase access increases, we must acknowledge that the education that people are accessing is not necessarily the same as it was under the previous student-staff ratio. The student-staff ratio in higher education has doubled. Although universities would love to continue to increase access, we cannot do that without a severe impact on the quality of higher education. We have a responsibility to recognise that.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): A number of the submissions have as their starting point the difficulties and problems of the present situation, such as disruptive youngsters, bullying, the burden of assessment, the heavily prescribed curriculum and the fact that the system is geared towards academic success as its principal outcome. Are you surprised that so many respondents have chosen to use the difficulties as their starting point, before addressing our invitation to discuss what might be done?

George MacBride: It does not surprise me—although it is regrettable—that the difficulties are the starting point for many of the submissions. There are two main reasons why I am not surprised. One is that school education in Scotland has gone through a difficult 10 or 12 years of financial cuts. We are now emerging from that period, which is welcome because one begins to see the results of increased expenditure in schools. Of course, I argue that expenditure has not been increased sufficiently, but there has been a change since those years.

Another reason why I am not surprised is that the media perception of schools, teachers and young people is often negative. I say the media rather than the public perception, because polls of public perception tend to show that the public has a high opinion of Scottish school education. It is easy for the media to get headlines from bad cases of bullying and it is appropriate that such matters are covered, but the fact that many schools are addressing bullying is not covered. Although those schools might not have reached perfection—they probably never will—they have made significant improvements. Some of the submissions refer to the benefits of the Scottish schools ethos network and the anti-bullying network. There are issues about disruption and disruptive pupils, but although such incidences are disturbing for the individuals involved, research shows that they are not as frequent as the media suggest.

The reasons why the submissions start with difficulties are the history of the past 10 or 12 years and the media's descriptions of the education system. There are issues to address, but I hope that positive aspects will also be considered in the debate. Teachers see negatives every day in school. I have just recovered from fairly severe bruising that resulted from a girl kicking me. However, the negatives must be put in the context of the generally good order in Scottish schools.

David Eaglesham: One problem, to which I alluded in my opening statement, is that people have the proverbial nose to the grindstone. I cannot remember the name of the newspaper that suggested that teachers do not do their job properly, but that is the reverse of the reality. Teachers are so busy with their eyes down that they do not have a chance to look up.

One good feature of the McCrone settlement is that it gives teachers the opportunity for continuing professional development and to stop, stand back and think about what they see. When they dive back in, they will perhaps do things differently. The problem is that people work hard to get the system going, but they do not lift up their eyes to see the finishing line. That is not necessarily always the best way in which to work, which is reflected in the submissions.

Mike Doig: I, too, am not surprised that the submissions begin with the difficulties. If the question had been asked at any time in the past 25 years—which goes back to the start of the fairly continuous changes that we have been experiencing—the same answer would have been given. We are focused on immediate problems, which have become the starting points of the submissions. I want the national debate to result in a broader way ahead that will provide some predictability and allow us to lift our heads up to look beyond the immediate difficulties.

Michael Russell: In answer to earlier questions, Mike Doig wondered where the entrepreneurial vision is. I find it salutary to remember that, during the age of great entrepreneurial achievement in Scotland, half the young people did not go to school and the other half learned Latin and Greek. That is an exaggeration, but it shows that talking about education in schools is not necessarily the same as talking about changes in society or

highlighting what a society lacks. That is one of the problems that I have with Jackie Baillie's question, to which you responded. We seem to have locked ourselves into a tick-box situation in which inputs and outputs are understood and automatic, on the assumption that if we change the education system then society changes at the other end. The reality is not like that.

14:45

I want to turn to sections 2, 4 and 6 of the consultation paper and ask the three questions that have formed the committee's starting point in the inquiry. Section 2 asks "What is education for?" Although I appreciate that one could write a thesis on that topic, it might be interesting if, leaving aside the way that everyone has to be mired in the present, you could comment briefly on that question.

Secondly, I want you to build on that and tell us what you think Scottish education is for. Do we have a subset of education that is labelled Scottish education? What would change your overall perception of what education is for? Moreover, what elements should be brought into Scotland in order to answer that question?

Finally, what ideal structure would allow you to meet the points that are raised by the questions of what education and Scottish education are for? You do not have to write on both sides of the paper. However, you must see where I am coming from. It would be interesting if you could do some free thinking along those lines and come up with some responses.

Mike Doig: Very few of the youngsters who go out into society will have a career or a job for life. They will need, because they will have to be much more flexible and adaptable to circumstances, to have more initiative and self-confidence and to be more aware of other possibilities or directions. They will need to be more free thinking. We do not have much of that in our current system.

We have a well-structured system and a fairly well-defined curriculum, even though that is undergoing further change. However, the system does not have a lot of capacity to prepare youngsters, particularly those going through secondary education, for the kind of working life that many of us, in or out of the school system, have never experienced. As a result, we must be able to prepare youngsters not for the society but for the framework that they will enter, and to foster some of the survival skills that they will need.

Angela Roger: Although Mike Russell's questions invite a lengthy response, I will be brief. In the first place, education is about personal growth. In that respect, critical thinking—indeed, criticism where necessary—and engaging with and developing ideas are very important throughout the whole of education. The process is not limited to higher education; it begins in schools.

Education is also about a person's contribution to society, by which I mean Scottish culture as well as the economy. That is absolutely vital. Schools, further education institutions and universities all contribute to that objective. I should also point out that, in Scotland, we seem to value breadth above narrowness as far as intellectual participation and contribution to society are concerned.

The teaching profession is vital to the development of personal growth and critical thinking. We seek to develop teaching as a research-based profession, which sows the seeds for the profession, inculcates critical thinking in our young people and encourages them to ask questions, seek evidence and take good and measured decisions on the basis of that evidence. The proximity of our education system to the Parliament and the opportunity for us to give evidence are vital in developing that aspect of education.

George MacBride: The development of confident critical thinking is at the core of education, but that poses problems for those of us who run the education system. Alexander Scott's very short poem on what Scottish education is—"A telt ye, A telt ye"—is clearly the model of what Scottish education should not be in the 21st century, although it might have been like that in the past.

There are difficulties, because there are immediate challenges to those who run schools, when youngsters do their own thinking and start to say that they disagree with the way in which the organisation is being run. That is healthy, but we also have to ensure that those who run the education system, particularly teachers, have the confidence to deal with such challenges.

There is a general consensus in Scotland that in some sense—there will be differences among different groups in society—equity, social justice and social inclusion are important themes to which many different groups in Scottish society are signed up. Schools have a major role to play in the promotion of that in the way in which they operate and the way in which they include youngsters. They have to ensure that youngsters' voices are heard, that they have skills for life, and that they leave school with the appropriate attitudes, because if they have the skills to promote social justice, but do not want to use them, that is a bit of a waste. In addition to promoting specific aspects of Scottish culture in the narrow sense, I hope that schools are seeking to promote and illustrate the political culture.

David Eaglesham: I was going to say much of

what George MacBride said, but I am glad that he said it much more eloquently than I would have said it.

I want to pick up on the third part of Mike Russell's triple whammy, on section 6 of the consultation paper. It strikes me that there is a major problem, because everything that we have is modelled on capital resources and restructuring is virtually impossible. Whatever we think of public-private partnerships and private finance initiatives, they are possibly the only way in which to proceed—it would be impossible to imagine anything far beyond that at the moment. As long as we are thinking in terms of that kind of model, it is very difficult to get away from it. It tends, no matter how much we like to think about it, to narrow down the range of options that are available for structural change. Changing the boundaries between primary, secondary and further education depends on there being a building in which those can take place. That is an inhibiting factor.

Mr Monteith: George MacBride made a fairly stout defence of the comprehensive system. What does he think has been the impact on that system of the ability of parents to select schools by house purchase—moving to what they might feel, rightly or wrongly, is a better school in terms of output—which runs counter to the comprehensive ideal? To what extent can those who cannot move house exercise placing requests to make a similar choice in order to try to ensure that their children go to what they feel is a better school in terms of output? To what extent do those two factors undermine the comprehensive ideal? Have they undermined that ideal and should there be any change in parents' behaviour?

George MacBride: Brian Monteith's question raises several points. I will talk about urban areas, because this is not a point of debate for rural areas, for obvious demographic reasons. I would have thought that it is rarely necessary to purchase a house in what seemed to be a more advanced area, because legislation allows fairly ready transfer from one school to another. However, a rapid turnover of children can produce a destabilising effect.

There is a more fundamental problem, to which Brian Monteith alluded, which is the perception—often wrong—that there are better and worse schools. There is clear evidence that schools that serve predominantly disadvantaged areas and more fragile families—to use a form of shorthand—will achieve lower outcomes when measured by certificated attainment. There is clear statistical evidence of that. However, what the evidence does not reflect is that often, such schools are successful at promoting learning and if one considers the learning entry point and the exit point for children there has been significant progress—possibly more progress than in some of the more advantaged schools.

If we use only such attainment measures, we neglect totally the way in which many schools in difficult and sensitive areas can promote a wide range of skills and attitudes. Those schools can contribute significantly to areas such as crime prevention and drug use and they can provide appropriate interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. I am trying to avoid a trap here. Does the current legislation weaken the comprehensive ideal? Yes it does. However, I recognise that changing that legislation might not be politically possible.

The Deputy Convener: We could be brave enough. Our adviser wishes to ask a question.

Malcolm MacKenzie (Adviser): I thought of asking David Eaglesham in what year I was in his class, but I will refrain. I have a question for Angela Roger. The discussion has been along policy lines, but do you think that we are paying too high a price for widening access?

Angela Roger: Not yet. It depends how much wider it is expected that access should go. At the moment, we have gone about as far as the higher education system can bear. That has been done through the good will of staff and the management of universities by stretching the resources. To some extent, wider access has been made possible by the creative use of postgraduate students. That means that the opportunities that students have to access the brightest and best research-active staff have been limited. That cannot go any further. At the moment the price is reasonable, but it is not possible to extend it further.

Mike Doig: The school at which I was previously head teacher had quite a number of youngsters from families that did not aspire to higher education and had no experience of it. We were involved in a successful initiative, called the goals project, which encouraged youngsters to think about higher education and to focus on it. A similar project operated in the east of Scotland. The goals project was aimed at tapping into youngsters and families who would not have had higher education as a target. We engaged with them as early as the latter stages of primary school and worked through a programme of contacts with higher education personnel, brokered through local authorities and the universities.

I thought that that initiative had the potential, not to increase the raw number of pupils progressing to higher education—there might be some kind of finite limit that that system can cope with—but to provide an alternative source of applicants that would mean that the overall quality of youngsters transferring to higher education would be

increased and the background effect of social disadvantage would be reduced, even though that might make the system more competitive for people on the margin. That was a long-term project, starting in primary school and lasting for six or seven years, but I thought that it had a lot of promise. However, I have lost contact with the scheme since leaving that school.

It might not be possible constantly to increase the number of youngsters going into higher education, but it might be possible to increase their calibre.

15:00

Ian Jenkins: Angela Roger said that personal growth should be at the heart of the education system. Another important view relates to the idea of socialisation and enabling people to get on in society. Yet another view is that education should be a utilitarian mechanism that gives people knowledge in order to ensure that they can get a job and so on. Have we got the balance right between those three strands? How can we prioritise them?

For instance, if we think that there is not enough drama or personal growth activity in the curriculum, what is the mechanism by which that could be adjusted? I am a comprehensive man, as it were, but I believe that there is some room for pluralism. How can we engage with those issues while teachers, as David Eaglesham said, have their heads down doing their day-to-day work?

David Eaglesham: That is an interesting question. Given that I am a trade union official, it will not surprise you to hear that I think that the problem comes down to resources.

The function that is being discharged by each part of the system is dependent on the resource available. The resource above classroom level is not adequate to deal with a holistic approach to what young people are doing. We should not think of the issue in terms of spasms of developmental change, but should take a longitudinal view. In other words, what will have happened to a pupil during the years from the start of school to the end of secondary school in terms of structural change?

The same would apply to what happens to a pupil during the time that they spend in one school. The guidance system in secondary schools is usually the main way in which that is monitored, but it is not well resourced in relation to the aim of examining the needs of the pupil as they interact with the curriculum. With the best will in the world, a teacher of English, for example, will tend to focus on English rather than on the breadth of the curriculum. The resources are not available in secondary schools to allow the holistic development of a child to be considered. That is the key problem. As far as we can, we need to reflect the fact that the individual has directions and needs that have to be addressed in the overall context of the school.

Mike Doig: The pat answer to your question is that that is the responsibility of school managers and head teachers—I suppose that I might fall out with George MacBride and David Eaglesham over that. Not everybody is a zealot who wants to change the world, but I hope that all head teachers have a vision.

So often, that vision gets clouded by the immediacy of the situation that head teachers find themselves in and by the changes to which they are exposed and which they are required to manage. Just as English teachers may find it difficult to think big because they must focus on the teaching of English, my colleagues around the country are very much focused on the immediate issues that involve us. I genuinely do not know how much ability we have to step back and think about the bigger picture. That problem comes from the pressures of the system, which are felt both by us and by classroom teachers.

George MacBride: The fact that teachers and head teachers do not have time to think about those things is a major indictment of the current system. One might have thought that head teachers, who do not need to deal with the immediacy of 28 children in front of them, would have more time, but the reality is probably that their noses are to a different grindstone. Head teachers have other issues from which they dare not divert their attention.

That is a major issue within the system. We have about 40,000 or 50,000 teachers, all of whom are not only highly educated, but are in some sense quality assured through the General Teaching Council. Yet despite the move towards the chartered teacher structure, teachers lack the confidence or the time and energy to think about the broader issues.

The question was how we can reconcile the different strands of Scottish education. Introducing another subject is not the way forward. That was done in England, where one period per week of citizenship education was introduced. In Scotland, we promote the concept of education for citizenship, which permeates the curriculum and the rest of the school organisation.

In secondary schools, the variety of teaching methods within different subjects provides opportunities to think about personal growth. That approach could be applied across all subject areas, but only if we can move away from the insistent pressure to achieve enhanced certificate results at all costs, as if they were almost the only thing that matters.

Ian Jenkins: I agree. Some of the higher still examinations do not allow people to think about the big picture, but require them to put their heads down even further.

Lindsay Paterson (Adviser): I want to take us back a bit by asking a question that relates to Malcolm MacKenzie's question. Many of the submissions to the committee have stated that Scottish schools have paid too much attention to academic work. Indeed, I do not think that one submission has said that academic work is valuable. None of the submissions identifies what the role of academic work is. However, at its next public meeting, the committee will hear from Professor Joe Farrell, who claims that the academic attainment of university entrants is at a dangerously low level. The claim is that, far from concentrating too much on academic work, schools have made many inappropriate changes—perhaps including higher still—which have reduced the attention that is given to academic work. I would like to hear people's comments on that.

George MacBride: I do not share Professor Farrell's view that the academic attainment of students at the point where they leave school and enter higher education is significantly lower than it was. Their attainment may well be different from what it was when I left school or when Professor Farrell left school. Today, schools emphasise different things and seek to develop different skills. For example, when the Scottish Qualifications Authority carried out initial investigations into the proposed advanced higher courses for several subject areas, it found that the proposed courses were among the most academically demanding within the English-speaking countries of Europe. I would not start with Professor Farrell's premise.

My concern is that we tend to turn all forms of learning into forms that are easily measured because, to put it at its crudest, those things can easily be put into league tables. [*Interruption.*]

Sorry, I am having some difficulty due to the noise outside.

Mike Doig: The noise is from the Ireland fans celebrating their win.

Michael Russell: They are marching on the Parliament to debate education.

George MacBride: Perhaps.

The word "academic" has two senses. There is the good sense, in which I presume Professor Farrell is using it and to which Angela Roger referred earlier, which refers to thinking skills, critical skills and so on. There is also the bad sense, which refers to jumping through certain measured hoops. That is what people on our side of the table are concerned about, not about the development of genuine academic, critical skills. Sorry, that is a slightly incoherent answer.

David Eaglesham: I agree with George MacBride. I finished my degree and teaching qualification, I started teaching and within four years everything that I had learned in my degree was totally irrelevant to the job that I was doing. A year later, when I was working for Marks & Spencer, it was even less relevant. It was an on-going process of acquiring skills. We have got bound up in the eternal verity syndrome, of saying that there are certain things that you must know. That is not necessarily always the case. It is about how you acquire the skills.

There is perpetual tension between the basic skills and the higher-order skills and how they are acquired and maintained. George MacBride is right in the sense that many of the higher-order skills are difficult to assess in an objective way, yet they are crucial to what happens in society. There are perpetual competing demands, as some people say that the basics are not right so we should concentrate on them and others say that we should concentrate on the higher-order skills. The argument goes back and forth between those two.

Both sets of skills are essential. Certain basics must be mastered, or nothing else is possible. If someone cannot read, it is difficult to do anything from a printed source. We must bear it in mind that we want to take a holistic approach to education. It is not about numbers on doors. A young person who finishes school or is coming through higher education will face huge changes in their lifetime, even more change than many of us have faced in our lifetimes. We must prepare them in such a way that they are flexible and adaptable enough to deal with the situation. We cannot do that by hammering certain facts into them. Those may change as time moves on; nothing is immutable.

Mike Doig: The notion that standards among university entrants are dropping is not new, as I am sure that someone who has been in higher education for as long as Lindsay Paterson will know. That sort of argument fails to take account of the nature of the knowledge and skills that youngsters have. That has changed as the curriculum has evolved in the secondary school. I will answer the point with particular reference to Professor Farrell's comments, because I nearly choked on my corn flakes when I read them. He is ignoring the fact that over the years we have developed far more oral skills in language, which is what he was specifically commenting on, as he is a professor of Italian. That skill is perhaps not as prized in higher education as it is in secondary and now primary education. Oral skills are a necessary component of language studies. If that is not reflected in higher education it perhaps comes

back to the question that you are asking me about what we are preparing youngsters for in general.

Sally Brown (Adviser): We have been getting on to what we are preparing youngsters for. One of the points about the paper is that it is not about action tomorrow. It is about a framework. I think that the committee called it a practical vision for the future. It has six themes and they are not all about skills. How do you respond to the first five themes—the sixth one is about structuring—in relation to a framework that would help with decision-making in the future?

George MacBride: Do you mean a framework in the sense of an organisational framework?

Sally Brown: No. I mean a framework of purposes to enable young people to cope with change and uncertainty, to engage with ideas, to keep everyone involved with learning, to promote a sense of identity and to develop necessary skills. The themes are not all about skills. In the recent past we have had an obsession with skills. This approach does not have that obsession. How do you see those themes?

15:15

George MacBride: The first theme of coping with change and uncertainty seems to be correctly placed. That is a challenge that we all have to address. It is a challenge for teachers, because they have to cope with change, and sometimes—regrettably—with uncertainty. It is important to prepare young people of school age, and their parents, to deal with change. Work has been done on issues such as a sense of resilience. How can that be developed in young people? How can views on self-efficacy be developed? I do not simply mean the gurus who stand up and say, "Think positively and all will be well." Work is being done in those areas in schools and in education research.

The most important thing may be that young people should leave school recognising that they are going into a world that is continually changing, and that they have not just the skills, but the attitudes to help them to deal with change. However, schools cannot be expected to do that entirely on their own, because a huge range of other pressures are placed on youngsters. One hopes that more of them can become more positive. Unfortunately, all too often just now, some of them become negative.

We must also recognise that some ways of dealing with change and uncertainty may be effective for some people—may even be positive for them—but, for understandable reasons, those methods may be frowned on by society. I have always found it thought provoking to discuss issues such as territorial disputes with young people. There is a negative side to territorial gang disputes, but there is undoubtedly a sense in which some young people gain a sense of certainty from that sort of identification. That can include positive aspects, as well as the negative aspects of what we have just heard outside this room.

Preparing youngsters to deal with change and uncertainty is the overarching theme, which must lead to keeping everyone involved with learning, because if you are going to deal with change and uncertainty, you have to keep on learning. That may not be an answer to the question.

David Eaglesham: The key is the third theme of keeping everyone involved with learning. The process of change will continue. It is endemic. It will not go away and suddenly give us a golden period of absolute stability for everything to develop.

The real problem is the centrifugal effect of that change. If the merry-go-round keeps going faster and faster, more people will fall off the edge. My fear is that we will end up with major alienation in society, between those who are included—for example those who have access to higher education and everything else—and those who are not. If someone's grasp on the merry-go-round is tenuous in the first place, will they want to risk dislocating their shoulder by hanging on for dear life, when the force is trying to take them out? They could say, "I will let go" and move into the outer darkness, which is not in contact with the rest of education and, to some extent, is not in contact with the rest of society.

The emphasis on social inclusion is critical, because if we get to that position, the two parts of society will be distinct, will move further apart, and will be less likely to come together. That is the danger with change. For example, when people look at higher still, which in itself is a good change, they say, "It is too complicated. It went to pot two years ago, therefore we are not really committed to it. We will move further away from it." That is the critical issue.

Angela Roger: Themes 2, 3, 4 and 5—engaging with ideas, keeping everyone involved with learning, a sense of identity, and developing skills that are needed—are extremely important, but it is not that we are preparing young people to take part in a society that we are going to create. We are preparing them to take part in the society that they will create. I would like to recast theme 1 from merely coping with change and uncertainty to bringing about change and transformation in the society that they will create. That is one of the leaps that a thinking group like this one needs to take: it is not just about things that are going to happen to young people; it is their society, not ours. If we can crack how to prepare them for that,

we will have done a great job. We need to consult the youngsters.

Michael Russell: I would like a brief answer from each of you. You are all people who have spent your working lives in education. If you could wave your magic wand and change one thing to make Scottish education better, what would it be?

Mike Doig: Just one?

Michael Russell: Just one; that is all you have.

Angela Roger: More and better resources.

Mike Doig: Structured planning and managed change.

David Eaglesham: I have to vote for resources. That is two votes for resources.

George MacBride: A climate of mutual respect among all stakeholders, and that includes the young people.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for giving evidence this afternoon in the first stage of our inquiry. I suspend the meeting for five minutes. We will resume at 25 past 3.

15:20

Meeting suspended.

15:28

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: Let us start again. I ask everyone to ensure that their mobile phones and pagers are switched off. I welcome Judith Gillespie and Eleanor Coner from the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and Ann Hill and John Tierney from the Scottish School Boards Association. You will know that today's evidence session is the first in our inquiry on the purposes of education. Our advisers are with us and we have agreed that they can ask questions, if they wish to. We have received written evidence from both organisations. Would you like to take a few minutes to make introductory remarks or are you happy just to start?

Judith Gillespie (Scottish Parent Teacher Council): We are happy just to start.

Ann Hill (Scottish School Boards Association): We are happy, too.

The Deputy Convener: Who wants to start?

Ian Jenkins: I have a question for the whole panel. The SPTC's submission contains a strong plea for teachers to be allowed to teach. There is criticism of league tables, the emphasis on academic passes and other such ways of measuring school success. How will teachers be able to exert influence so that the necessary changes in the curriculum are made and the parameters are shifted in the direction in which you would like them to go?

Judith Gillespie: It is interesting to reflect on how much the culture has changed during the past 20 to 25 years. There is a tendency to think that the situation in which we find ourselves, with its league tables and targets, is an inevitable situation and to forget that, essentially, it has been created. There is a wide call for greater diversity and for schools to have an opportunity to try out different methods of teaching.

An example of that is the Glasgow system whereby groups of youngsters go off to do Scottish vocational qualifications instead of doing one of their eight standard grades. That method is proving to be successful. Getting youngsters interested in one area of the curriculum often leads to their interest spreading across to the other areas of the curriculum. The whole business of collecting figures and numbers militates against initiatives of that kind, because SVQs do not count in the measurements and figures.

It was interesting that people gave us spontaneous feedback on the desire for a better balance. We did not set up such a response, but received it from all the meetings that we held. A better balance would allow for more diversity, which would enable us to recognise and value people for what they do, rather than to insist that everyone has to conform to a single pattern that is largely dictated by league tables and targets.

It was felt that having such diversity and valuing people more for what they were would take the pressure off. That requires central action—it cannot be done wholly at school level. Teachers and, in turn, parents are required to conform. Conformity comes out of absolute requirements. The shift must come from the top.

Ian Jenkins: I did not ask my question terribly well, but I asked it because I am interested in what part central authority has to play in that process of change.

Judith Gillespie: Central authority is key in such an area; central authority must listen to the message and must take the pressures off. It is interesting that league tables have been dropped in Ireland and Wales because of acknowledgement that they put too much pressure and too many constraints on the schools and become the driving force behind everything.

If we want to free up the system more, we must take off those constraints and allow the system underneath to flourish. That does not mean that we should give up all forms of monitoring or that we should hide information. There is no reason why schools cannot provide that kind of information. Constraints are imposed on the

system by the manner in which the information is provided and the centrality of the information.

Ann Hill: I agree with everything that Judith Gillespie said.

Michael Russell: I want to return to the issue that I explored with the previous witnesses, which is based on themes 2, 4 and 6 of the discussion paper. The genesis of the paper was in the committee's discussion of what education is for at an away day last year. Among others, Lindsay Paterson was present at that discussion. The committee's idea is for the discussion to expand outwards from that question.

I will put my question in three parts. I apologise if that requires the witnesses to scribble down notes. First, in the absolutely blue skies of philosophical terms, what is education for? Secondly, do distinctive Scottish requirements need to be added to the definition of education and, if so, what are they? Thirdly—to bind those two questions together—how do we achieve that vision? What structures and activities do we need to put the vision into practice? The witnesses can assume that we cannot have the revolution, although they are allowed to desire one.

Judith Gillespie: It is nice to have the opportunity to think back to what education is for. The committee's inquiry uses a different style from the national debate, which is more pragmatic. The question leads one to reflect on the 20th century. One key point about the 20th century was the huge development of communication, including developments in transport, such as the development of aviation and the improvement of road transport, and in electronic and satellite communication. Communication development has had a knock-on effect in schools.

It is good to consider the question in those terms. We know what the big changes were and what impact they had in schools. We should look forward into this century and discover the seeds of the big changes that will have similar knock-on effects on the school system. Big changes and education are tied together. On the one hand, education, through research, leads the big changes but, on the other hand, the big changes filter back to education. The process is multilevel.

It is difficult to look very far ahead into the 21st century. On the whole, people get such predictions wrong. There were three significant issues in the newspapers at the weekend. One is the fact that the glaciers in the Himalayas have shrunk back by 30 miles, which shows that, like it or lump it, environmental matters will be important. That will have implications for our use of technology: we will have to use technology efficiently and not wastefully. We cannot have vast storage depots for out-of-date computers. We must examine our technology and use it more efficiently.

Another significant issue is the genome project and the development in our understanding of genetics, which will have an impact on health. It is an important point that if we live longer, we care more about what happens for longer. If we live only for 40 years, we care only about what happens for 40 years, plus our children's lifetime. If we live for 80 or 100 years, issues such as nuclear waste suddenly matter to us and we cannot just forget them. If we live longer, attitudes will change.

The third significant thing that I would pick out of the Sunday papers is the huge death rate from AIDS and malnutrition in Africa. If we think in terms of interconnectedness—which I said was a by-product of the 20th century—we can no longer ignore things that happen in other parts of the world. If we want to look at the big picture, the education system has to raise our vision.

Answering the question of how education can do that takes me back to what Ian Jenkins has said: we have to find space to allow us to move away from the tightly constructed school curriculum. There must be space for people to explore ideas, wherever those ideas may take us. I do not think that all learning or all good thinking should be certificated.

Globalisation affects Scotland. We cannot ring fence Scotland and say, "This is the Scottish solution." We should say, "This is the Scottish take on the global solution." Some things will be appropriate in Scotland in the global context, but occasionally it is important to lift our vision higher and to wonder where we may be in 100 years' time. I doubt whether any of our guesses about that will come close to being right, but it is important to realise that, wherever we are in 100 years' time, it will be very different from where we are now. What happens internationally will impact on Scotland.

I have not said anything very specific, but you invited us not to be specific.

Ann Hill: The SSBA was not quite so philosophical with our members. We stopped at asking about what we thought parents were particularly interested in—their children. What is education for? To give a simple summary, parents see education as a system that should encourage their children to be happy and well rounded. They expect the system to provide children with the skills to think and learn. The system is not to teach them mathematics, English or environmental studies; it is to give them a grounding in the basics, allowing them to make progress.

Parents also told us that not enough information is available for them. Parents can help their children to learn. Members may know about the Strathclyde parent prompts. That was a good

initiative, which helped parents to take part in their children's education, especially the parents who felt that they would not be able to help because they did not have time or because they could not read, or could not read English.

A parent prompt was a quick descriptor saying, for example, "Today we are teaching mathematics and will teach the children how to count to five. Next time you are at the supermarket, ask your child to put four bananas in a bag, or three, or five." It was as simple as that. That kind of thing grabs the parent, who says, "Yes, I can teach my children. I can be part of their learning." In education, we need more information and more encouragement for parents to participate in their children's learning.

You asked about distinctive Scottish features in education. In Scotland, we have a superb sense of identity—and for a Shetlander to say that she feels Scottish at times is not bad.

Michael Russell: You have been in Dumfries too long, Ann.

Ann Hill: I know. What I have said may get back to my mother but I will not tell her.

I would not say that we need to lose some of that Scottishness; we need to add to it because we have a superb multiculture nowadays, which we should make the best of. By joining together as a multiculture, we will get rid of some of the things that are wrong with Scotland—the bigotry, bullying, intolerance of each other and lack of confidence. We need to have a sense of Scottishness. Being Scottish will allow us to create such a culture, because we have a happy, friendly atmosphere that encourages people to come in.

15:45

How can we achieve that? If I knew that, I would be worth a fortune. Like Judith Gillespie, I think that information and communications technology will play an important part. The SPTC's submission talks about basic skills in drama, art and music. We have talked to parents and students—we have done a lot with students—but we are nowhere near ready to come to you with our national debate report. We have just started. We have had 43 road shows and 54 training courses, but we are a long way from being ready.

Parents and students say that they want to see more of the basics of numeracy and literacy. There is also a groundswell of support out there for schools being open longer, rather than teachers working longer, so that the facilities are there for pupils to go in at the end of the day and use the computers or the library. We are not looking for a baby-sitting club; we want something with a purpose. Parents also say that class numbers need to be lower. We have had a policy on that issue for years and believe that classes should be restricted to 25 or 20 pupils. Addressing those kinds of issues will help children to learn.

The Deputy Convener: I am interested in your organisations' views on education for citizenship. I have worked with kids on citizenship in their communities and on global citizenship, and I am interested in Judith Gillespie's response to the global situation and how we work with children. If a pupil is thinking about citizenship, they are thinking about their responsibility—where they are and where the rest of the world is. I sense that the SPTC is fairly critical of the whole idea of education for citizenship.

Judith Gillespie: We are not against the idea of education for citizenship, but we do not think that the document that is proposed offers education for citizenship. That is where we are coming from. Youngsters need to be informed and aware, but the document is not the right approach. The difficulty is that the Learning and Teaching Scotland proposals came up with a definition of citizenship and did not allow debate on it. Nonetheless, we did not buy into that definition. I trawled the document and found that the words "state" and "power" are mentioned only once, on page 6. The word "government" is mentioned only in conjunction with local government.

There is a sense in which someone can be a member of a community and have social interaction and a series of other relationships that are to do with communities. However, in our view, citizenship has a particular relationship with politics and government, which involves power. Youngsters are short-changed if they do not understand power complexes.

Many youngsters are involving themselves in single-issue politics rather than engaging in the traditional party-political structure. They feel that they have a better chance to exercise influence and power through the single issues. We must recognise the fact that young people know fine that, to achieve, there are things that they must do. They must have contacts, and who someone is in society has a much greater impact than anything else on how successful they are likely to be. Who their contacts are is very important.

Our argument is not against the teaching of citizenship, nor is it against what the Learning and Teaching Scotland document does. We think that there is a lot of merit in the idea of building up an understanding of social relationships. Our argument is that the Learning and Teaching Scotland document does not teach citizenship.

John Tierney (Scottish School Boards Association): I think that the issue is more fundamental than that. Citizenship should be

taught in schools, but for more basic reasons. Citizenship should be taught to foster a sense of identity, to enhance Scottishness and to encourage people to participate in the system in which we are participating today. A lot of young people feel detached from all that, which means that they do not get involved in local councils or voluntary organisations, for example. It is extremely important that we encourage young people as early as possible to get involved. Speaking to youngsters, I find that they do not engage with the system at all—they do not feel part of it. When they are asked to get involved, they feel that their views are not taken seriously.

In Glasgow—I am sure that something similar happens in other areas—the local school boards and associations involve young people on a day-to-day basis. Glasgow has also set up a council of young people.

Our fundamental finding was that young people felt that, when they put something constructive across, it was filed away and not taken on board. It is important that, from a young age, people are encouraged to find their sense of identity. We must ensure that when they participate—at that early age, not later in life—their views are taken seriously.

Jackie Baillie: The previous set of witnesses went off at a tangent when I asked them this question, which is not about measurements. I am concerned that many children are still left behind in schools in Scotland. Attainment levels—I am not just talking about academic attainment levels—show great differences. In the past we have concentrated on inputs and have said that we are doing this, that and the other. How do we get to a position where we can ensure more equality of outcome? How can we focus on the outcomes for an individual child's potential, rather than on the individual solutions that we put in place to fit part of a problem?

Judith Gillespie: If we consider what Glasgow is doing in relation to SVQs, we might find part of the answer. To judge using only one measure suggests that equality means that everyone should achieve exactly the same. It is perhaps more useful to recognise that people achieve different things and that we can value equally the different things that they achieve. That would turn equality round: we would make our valuing of the achievement the thing that makes it equal. That does not mean to say that we would allow people not to achieve; it means that we would recognise achievement in different ways. The imaginative approach that Glasgow has taken using the SVQ is to say that, if a form of education is not suiting a young person, that does not mean that they are stupid; it means that we should build in another dimension.

I recently heard a talk by an American academic who said that, if a youngster fails to learn a certain form of mathematics, for example, it is completely wrong to keep teaching it to them. The way forward is to try something else—if the youngster does not get fractions, perhaps they will understand them when they move on to decimals. In other words, do not keep flogging a dead horse. We must show sensitivity to youngsters and recognise where they are likely to make progress. We must not have only one measurement. We must learn to say that, when youngsters achieve differently, they are still achieving.

I had a long phone call this week with a woman who was very distressed, because her daughter had been identified as dyslexic. We went through everything and I said that schools quite often compensate for dyslexic youngsters. She agreed and said that the child was very numerate and artistic. That is fine. We should focus on what youngsters can do. When people are left behind, let us ensure that they are not being left behind because we use only one measure. A change in attitude in society would help to include more people, because the things that people can do would be valued.

Eleanor Coner (Scottish Parent Teacher Council): The system is all about success and failure at the moment. The children know that they have failed if they do not pass their exams. Until we get rid of that view, the other qualifications that they have achieved and the other goals that they have reached—the little things, compared with university degrees—will never become important, because the system is all geared towards exams.

John Tierney: That is absolutely correct. Even though a fantastic pilot with SVQs is being carried out in Glasgow, which I hope will be successful, there is still a perception that SVQ skills are second class compared with academic, university skills. Eleanor Coner is absolutely right. Until we get rid of that view, there will always be difficulties.

Ann Hill: I go back to the question of how to improve the situation for the children who are left behind. Individual learning plans should give us the opportunity to help the children who are not academically gifted. We need flexibility in the system and we should have rewards for kids. We should not have only exam passes; we should give rewards for the ability to tie shoelaces or draw a lovely picture, because some children might not be academically gifted.

Fundamental to all that is a need to reconsider class sizes. We need to consider education from age three so that the progression from age three to five is inherent in primary school education. We need to have another serious look at the progression from primary school to secondary school to university, because there seems to be a

divide between school and university. We have heard some students ask why, instead of wasting their time treading water in sixth year, they cannot start university courses in schools. A lot of children are left behind and we lose a lot of children when they are bored.

Lindsay Paterson: Do you think that parents should be more involved in the management of schools and, if so, in what ways?

Ann Hill: I am sure that the other witnesses will add their views to this. We did a survey on the issue fairly recently. When we asked five years ago whether local authorities should be in charge of schools, 98 per cent of respondents said that they should. When we asked the question this year, 88 per cent of respondents said that they should. However, you have to remember that we were asking school boards. We think that the survey shows the level of support from school boards in certain areas. As you know, we are involved in the on-going Government review of the issue.

Fundamentally, parents want local authorities to remain in charge of schools, because of the accountability between local authorities, school boards and the Government that that allows. Parents are quite happy with their current level of involvement in the management of schools. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 placed a crucial duty on parents to improve the education system when they are involved in the school. Although the act refers to school boards, I think that it is every parent's responsibility to be a partner in the education system.

Judith Gillespie: My answer is straightforward. The dynamic of the partnership between parents and schools is different from that of a management relationship. Parents are involved in a school only because they have a child there. If the child was not at the school, the parent would not be involved. That is a natural focus for the parent to have and, as the child moves through the school system, the parent's focus shifts. The parent begins by being interested in nursery schools, after which their focus shifts to the primary school. They then become obsessed with standard grades and higher still and with what their youngster will do after school.

If parents are asked in the early days of their children's education what they want for their children, they will tend to say that they want their children to be happy. They then go through a middle angst stage before they come out at the other end. At that stage, their youngsters are starting to do all kinds of things that the parents cannot control and with which they are not entirely comfortable. Parents end up saying that what the youngsters are doing is all right as long as they are happy.

Parents are a constant factor in the debate about youngsters and schools, as they move through the school system with their children. However, the management of a school needs a different kind of constancy—a constancy that stays the same throughout. It is in the nature of the parental relationship that it moves with the child through the system. That is the correct way for it to be encapsulated, which is not to say that there should not be good links, interaction or access. However, the fundamental, child-focused nature of the relationship between the parent and the school should be recognised.

16:00

Ian Jenkins: I have a brief question. We have recently been discussing free school meals and the debate has raised questions about nutrition. Yesterday, I attended a conference on physical education and the physical activity task force. It is clear that nutrition is a major area that needs to be addressed in schools. PE teachers said yesterday that they want to ensure that youngsters get a certain number of hours for PE. They also want to see nutrition as part of the curriculum. The Executive says that there should be PE in primary schools—some of the PE teachers agreed with that. Do you want that to happen? If so, what mechanism should be used for implementing it, or should schools have the freedom to set their own timetables?

Judith Gillespie: The advantage of the Executive saying that there should be PE in primary schools is that money tends to follow what the Executive says. Money is always important, but it is also important to key into what the youngsters are saying about PE. John Beattie's report says that girls switch off from PE. The girls perceive physical activity to be horribly macho and they do not want to get muscles. They also think that PE might mess their hairdos and so forth.

However, it is possible to sell girls activities such as aerobics, step classes—when they were fashionable—or modern dance. It is important, where possible, to be sensitive to what youngsters are likely to respond to. I agree that the question is critical, but we have to thank the 20th century transport development called the motor car for the state that we are in at present. People do not walk any more, not even as far as the bus stop. The motor car has created a fundamental shift in how fit or unfit we are.

I am always struck by the fact that schools focus on team games. Youngsters emerge from school thinking that they cannot participate in physical activity unless 11 other people are involved. It is possible to identify activities that youngsters can enjoy doing, from which they can get a sense of achievement and in which they will continue to

participate after they leave school. If that happens, youngsters will buy into physical activity for life. It is also true that, if youngsters are not preached at, they are more likely to pick something up.

Ian Jenkins: The PE teachers would broadly agree with what you say, but they want something in the curriculum. My question may have been too long, but I wanted to ask whether you thought that PE should be on the national curriculum—whether it should be statutory.

Judith Gillespie: One of the things—

The Deputy Convener: Unfortunately, we are tight on time, so we cannot start a debate on the national curriculum.

Ian Jenkins: I know. I am sorry.

John Tierney: If you are asking about free school meals, I think that they should be provided and should be part of the school day. Proper, balanced meals will benefit every school child. I understand what Judith Gillespie is saying about physical education. I do not know how to solve problems with girls in that respect.

The Deputy Convener: The question concerned physical education and health.

Ann Hill: We tend to buy into the rest of the Scottish curriculum. Perhaps we need more guidance from the Scottish Executive, but local flexibility is needed. We could say that there needs to be a football match every week in every school in Scotland, but many schools do not have enough people to make a football team.

Malcolm MacKenzie: I have a general point, which is directed to Judith Gillespie in particular. The SPTC submission says:

"Coping with change is simply part of the human condition."

The committee's consultation paper suggests that we are living in a time of exponential change. Have we overstressed that? Are we making too much of it, or are you saying that, although there is fast change, there is nothing new about that? Has the point been overdone?

Judith Gillespie: To say that change is constant is a contradiction. When we were considering our paper, our starting point was to reflect on periods of change and to think about the incredible changes that have occurred during various periods in the past. We are in a period of change, although often change cannot be seen until one is beyond it. However, I do not think that this period of change is necessarily more dramatic than those in the past.

In our paper, we discuss how easy it is to say that things have not changed in the past 40 years. However, that is not true in the bigger picture or in schools. Often, we use common terminology, but common terminology masks things that have moved quickly.

I started to use computers in 1970. I would take a stack of punched cards and post them out to a mainframe computer. They would be returned and I would find that I had forgotten a comma. The pace of change has been incredible over the past 30 years. It is still fast, but I do not think that it has suddenly speeded up. It is true that we are learning to accommodate many changes that have been developed at the sharp edge of research; we are learning how to build those changes into our lives so that they become routine. Sometimes, we get things wrong and overemphasise some pieces of technology while under-emphasising others. Getting the balance right in respect of technology can be stressful—we are going through a stressful period now. We must anticipate the remarkable developments in the future that involve the same kind of rethinking and absorbing of mechanistic changes in ways of living. I do not think that the pace of change is any faster than it was in the past.

Ann Hill: I do not think that the paper overemphasises change. I have 25 years' experience as a parent in education and will probably have another six years' experience by the time that my children go through university. We must welcome constant change, as that is how society progresses. We should not be frightened by it.

The Deputy Convener: I thank the witnesses for giving evidence. We will have a two-minute break to allow the next set of witnesses to come in.

16:08

Meeting suspended.

16:10

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: Let us start again. I welcome Gordon Jeyes and Shelagh Rae, from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. This is the first day of evidence in the committee's inquiry into the purposes of education. You have the opportunity to make an opening statement.

Gordon Jeyes (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): Thank you very much—we will take that opportunity. We have set out an introductory statement, which we will be happy to leave with the committee. I shall highlight some of the points in it.

We welcome the committee's inquiry. It is

important that the Parliament, in its scrutiny role, reviews purposes from time to time. Under the intense pressure of daily activity, it is easy for schools to focus on particular purposes. It is necessary to look at the balance of economic competitiveness, qualifications, social cohesion and personal growth and it is important that we do not focus too much on a system that is dominated solely by assessment and examination success. Parents and students seem to see that happening a bit at present. No doubt, we might pick up on that issue.

We believe that considerable progress has been made on the back of quality initiatives in Scottish schools. Standards have been raised as a consequence of school effectiveness, as the monitoring of examinations for league tables and such measurements show. However, that is perhaps not enough; perhaps we need different models of effectiveness that are about the effectiveness of civic society as a whole. The effectiveness of schools depends on their relationships with communities and, crucially, with parents and families. It is about families, playgroups, community centres, youth clubs and groups of schools. It is about models that acknowledge the fact that schools need to engage with a commitment to learning across boundaries, and on a broad front. We encourage politicians and policy makers, in meeting the needs of every child, not to tread warily around the notion of equality that says that everyone should be treated differently according to her or his needs.

We look for further streamlining of the current systems of accountability and of the number of management organisers and plans. We need to do more culturally to encourage a system in which teachers and other children's professionals have confidence in their judgment and are held to account accordingly, through a scrutiny process. Too much emphasis has been placed on systems and structures and not enough has been placed on values, relationships and attitudes.

We need to ensure that schools are equipped to contribute to meeting social justice targets. There are issues around how we find the right language to support or challenge families or those who act as surrogates for families. That is not a straightforward matter for local authorities or the state. Raising achievement and attaining social inclusion are too important for teachers to do on their own. Schools must not be just for those who attend them; they must not be just for those who are healthy and cared for. The efforts that are currently being made for the whole child are to be commended.

16:15

As we take things forward—for different client groups and with increased diversity—we must be conscious that the system and the people in the system, including parents and students, are notoriously conservative about encouraging greater creativity within it.

Schools can operate better as part of our democracy. More democratic schools are engaging with their local communities and are doing so as communities themselves. It is about the democratic way of life—about life being lived to the full, with each individual stretching to their full capacity and society reaching its collective potential.

I am happy to pick up themes from the committee's discussion paper.

Michael Russell: I apologise to Gordon Jeyes—I will have to go in about five minutes' time. Let me be boringly predictable and ask the same questions that I asked previous witnesses—although you have not been here for the whole meeting and do not know what I asked.

Gordon Jeyes: I could just say, "We agree."

Michael Russell: Well, that does it, then.

I am particularly interested in sections 2, 4 and 6 of the consultation paper—not that I am not interested in the rest of the paper, but those sections seem to encompass the crux of the matter and to serve as the committee's starting point for this inquiry.

There are lots of questions and discussion but, essentially, three basic questions are asked. First, what is education for? Letting yourself slip the leash—or otherwise—of your association, could you tell me what you, having spent your working life in education, think education is for?

Secondly, what particular aspects of Scottish education do we need to examine when considering that question? This is not just a matter of identity or culture, but what characteristics of Scottish education are important?

Thirdly, you are right to say in your opening remarks—I agree—that we have probably had too many discussions about structures and not enough about ideas. In the context of what you think education is for, how do we make ideas the central purpose of education? Has that already been done? What work do we need to do?

Shelagh Rae (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): As far as the purposes of education are concerned, we do not view the matter as being about merely what it is within the ability of a school, a local council or a Scottish Parliament to give by way of policies and structures. What we do is make a contribution to the education of the child—we contribute only to part of it.

I hope that we are about developing individuals and I agree that we could be and need to be better at it. Education is about nurturing children through to their becoming young adults and on into adult life. We have to ask what children need to develop. Clearly, they need in order to develop certain basic skills, basic knowledge and so on, but it is increasingly difficult to ascertain what those basic skills should be. There is broad agreement about what they are, but some of the skills that I taught 30 years ago, when I was a maths teacher, are not really relevant now. Some of the analytical skills remain pertinent, but some of the attitudes are not.

We have to get beyond thinking of education as merely transmission of skills and knowledge. It is about developing in young people the capability to continue to learn for themselves. No matter what they do as they move into adult life—in their working lives, in their family lives or in participating in their communities—they will need certain skills including the ability to get on with other people and work with others, self-discipline, initiative and enterprise. Those are all skills that we would like to develop in children. They are people skills and relate to the contribution that children make.

Sometimes we focus too much on debating what subjects should or should not be in the curriculum, but that is becoming less important. What is more important is how to access knowledge and develop skills as one goes through life. Careers will continue to change; we are already seeing that there is no such thing as a career for life. People nowadays can expect to have about three different careers. Therefore, the question of what education is for is difficult to answer, but the emphasis should be on making people able to develop throughout their lives.

Gordon Jeyes: There is a tendency to use glib phrases in policy for a while before looking for the real meaning below the phrases. Lifelong learning is a case in point. We consider documents from the perspective that lifelong learning applies up to the age of five and begins again at 16, 17 or 18. We do not programme a person's life or involve them in choices and the capacity to learn throughout their life. Therefore, young people are under intense pressure to do a group of highers while holding down a job for 28 hours. They have not made a choice as such and are not playing the long game of learning from a rich variety of experiences.

Schools in general, but secondary schools in particular, are not good at seeing where they sit in the continuum. They see themselves as the alpha and omega. Primary and nursery schools and further education are better in that respect. We must move away from secondary schools seeing themselves as the starting point. As my colleague said, the range of learning is too narrow in terms of experiences. We have contributed to that through curriculum reform that makes courses with vocational content become pseudo-academic courses—as if we can teach parity of respect by pretending that things are the same.

Michael Russell: Neither of you has moved a stage further to the distinctive nature of Scottish education. However, I will push ahead to that in a moment. First, I want to follow up on a point that Shelagh Rae made. You said that much of the maths that you taught 30 years ago, when you started teaching, is no longer relevant. I am not a mathematician, but it seems to me that, despite research of all sorts, there are eternal verities in maths. Therefore, what did you mean by that point? Has the style and method of teaching changed? Has the knowledge that is imparted changed?

Shelagh Rae: I suppose that Michael Russell is correct that there are eternal verities, as he puts it. What is important in mathematics, for example, is the analytical process whereby skills are developed in collecting, analysing and judging information; patterns are identified and tested and so on. However, 30 years ago we had to rely on books of logarithmic tables and slide rules because calculators did not exist and computers were in big rooms and not accessible.

All that has changed. Scientific calculators and computers, for example, can do trigonometry and calculus. Routine drudgery is no longer necessary. We must get beyond content and assess what are the underlying skills. Colleagues have developed, in different subjects, similar skills of collecting, analysing and testing information—for example in history, social subjects and science. We should be less hung up about content and get underneath to discover the fundamental skills that it is important to develop in young people. We must develop people's different aptitudes.

Michael Russell: It is surely important to learn how to do calculus, for example, before relying on a computer. When the great virus destroys every chip and motherboard in the world, we will need somebody somewhere, no matter how obscure, who can do calculus. Is not that right? Perhaps Malcolm MacKenzie, our adviser, knows how to do calculus. He will save us.

It is good to encourage young children to find things out and think for themselves. However, there must be baseline skills, which theme 5 of the discussion paper mentions. Some of those baseline skills must be quite complex, because although their results can be achieved by other means, to understand them, one must sometimes perform the tasks oneself. Am I being naive about that?

Shelagh Rae: No. The idea that people should understand from first principles is important, but the questions of who, when and how must be developed. Fundamental principles must be developed. In another arena, I talked recently about the need for basic literacy and numeracy skills in adults. As a matter of adult education, I am aware that an adult who does not have those basic skills lacks dignity. The impact of that on such adults' lives is huge.

I do not suggest that no skill or knowledge is important, but there is so much knowledge and there are so many skills nowadays and we cannot overload the curriculum by asking everyone to learn everything. In the curriculum, we have not come to terms with what it is important to teach versus everything that it is possible to teach.

Gordon Jeyes: Sometimes, the debate on core skills is not taken far enough. We can begin with literacy and numeracy and take them to imply depth of understanding. When we have had a lack of electronic engineers, we have sometimes thought that we should introduce technological subjects into the curriculum, whereas other European countries would say, "Let's teach more maths."

Core skills should be numeracy, literacy and—our association believes—a group of skills that relate to citizenship, working with other people and social skills. Then we would have the scope to introduce different experiences of learning in schools. We must avoid prescription. Whatever national priorities we agree, they should not be central priorities.

Michael Russell: Would that apply to teaching entrepreneurship, for instance, which *The Herald* covered yesterday on its front page. Should money be devoted to that? It might not be possible to teach some subjects in that way. Attitudes towards society might be more important.

Gordon Jeyes: Greater opportunity exists to fit in with a range of experience in work, such as that which involves entrepreneurship, that can meet the needs of many children who might go on to leadership roles or who might work in a range of equally valued vocations. There can be scope for such work.

On the question about Scotland, schools need to engage with their communities so that they reflect the core skills on which we can agree, the national priorities and values, which can vary around Scotland. We should not try to generalise about those values, but the press talks about the values of Edinburgh or Glasgow, as opposed to those of Callander or Stromness. How a school engages with its community must increasingly be the issue. As a western European economy, we must also be able to learn well, fast and better to make our way in the world. That is a given.

As for structures, ideas and values must be debated more. As the pace of change increases, we must find a language for speaking in some depth to parents and students about the values that are being transmitted. I will take a secondary school structural point as an example. Subjects are helpful as a way of organising knowledge. Departments might not be helpful as the only way of giving teams an identity with which to relate to students and parents. We are stuck with some Victorian structures, but some current work on the whole needs of the child, planning for them and engaging effectively with parents can bring rewards.

If we are to consider 100 per cent of students, we should not, in all the great scrutiny, lose sight of the fact that most students' education performance has never been better, which does not mean that, at the top, there is no scope for improvement. For 20 to 25 per cent of students, we still do not have the definition and the challenges quite right. However, between starting assessment for all in the late 1970s and now, there has been massive improvement. Standards have never been higher.

Jackie Baillie: You mentioned something earlier that I would like you to explain further. You said that we need to get away from the notion that children should be treated differently. Much of the evidence that we have heard, even from yourselves, has been about recognising the differences that exist—including academic or vocational differences—how children learn and the external circumstances that affect their learning. I think that the education system has a responsibility to ensure that each child achieves his or her full potential. I do not necessarily think that we go about it the right way just now, but I was slightly concerned by your comment. Maybe I have taken it out of context.

16:30

Gordon Jeyes: Thank you for that question. This is a well-chaired meeting and I was conscious that time was short, but I was actually trying to make completely the opposite point, so please forgive me. We are far too wary about the notion that education should be to each according to their needs from each according to their abilities. For children who have very different needs, we can come up with very different solutions. However, in Scotland we are a bit cautious—at all levels of policy making—about that. We should face up to that and realise that, for many youngsters, programming education completely differently from 14 or so onwards can make sense as long as we have a system that is held to account and whose professionals make judgments in partnership with

families. I agree entirely with Jackie Baillie.

Sally Brown: When answering Mike Russell's questions about purposes, you emphasised a great deal the need to develop skills of different kinds; that has, of course, been heavily emphasised over the past decade. The themes of the committee's consultation paper do not necessarily emphasise skills so much. In fact, that probably reveals a value position about what is important in purposes. The fifth theme is about skills, but the first four themes are "Coping with Change and Uncertainty", "Engaging with Ideas", "Keeping Everyone Involved with Learning" and "Promoting a Sense of Identity". How do you react to those four themes?

Shelagh Rae: That depends on how you define skills. I was trying to say that I do not define skills narrowly. I was talking about a range of experiences and qualities that young people must develop if we are to help them to play a full part in society. The point that I was making in answer to Mike Russell's question was that, in the past, there has been overemphasis on subjects as a way of developing specific skills. We must develop a range of ways in which to allow children to develop people skills and qualities. I do not think that we disagree on that, although perhaps I am using slightly different terminology.

It is important that young people develop the qualities of self-discipline, initiative, motivation, caring and compassion. They must develop understanding and appreciation of the many things about cultural and recreational experiences in life that are important to us all. They must develop an ability to understand the contribution that they can make to society and to acknowledge their responsibility to society. Those things are extremely important.

As Gordon Jeyes said, because of the current emphasis on measurement and performance measures, it appears—regrettably—that Scottish society values a particularly narrow set of skills and abilities based around literacy and numeracy. I do not downplay the importance of literacy and numeracy, but other skills are important, too. As the old adage says, people start to value what they measure. If we value those other things, as the committee's paper says, we must find a way of reflecting that. We must show in our schools that we value those skills and we should reward those who put a great deal of emphasis on developing young people who are all-rounders.

Gordon Jeyes: We need to encourage young people to take risks for success. We need to indicate that there is scope for failure, that people can learn from failure and that it is okay to fail. There is scope for failure in raising money for charity, organising events, participating in outdoor activities and being part of a team. It is not possible to have social policy that does not involve risks. We seem to think that we can manage the risk out of what we do. That limits the horizons of our young people. They may be getting more A passes, but are they effective learners?

Do we have the political and national confidence to take a longer view of what we are encouraging our young people to do? Can we have 100 per cent schools? We have never fully resourced schools to achieve that. I am talking not only about children with special educational needs, but about those who have care needs or emotional and behavioural problems. How can we ensure that schools are resourced to allow them to support everyone and to set the right curriculum targets in their plans?

Irene McGugan: You have put the questions that we posed back to us. Gordon Jeyes said that teachers need to have confidence in their abilities. We have agreed that we need to move away from a very pressured system in which the emphasis is on measurement and outcomes. We need to find ways of reflecting that change in schools and resourcing it. The role of the teacher is integral to delivering that new approach. How do you think teachers will feel about that? What resources do we need to achieve the change in schools that we want?

Gordon Jeyes: We need a system in which we seek to develop teachers rather than to support them. Our approach to staff development has been conditioned by a set of pressures, beginning with the introduction of standard grade. We have had to deal with off-the-shelf solutions. From focus group meetings that we have held recently with parents and students, we know that the relationship with teachers is the key to moving forward. It is important not only for teachers to have confidence—although the way in which the system has been organised until now has sapped teachers' confidence—but for others to have confidence in them.

Shelagh Rae: Early years, primary and special schools are excellent at doing such work. Because there is slightly less pressure on them, they are able to focus on the whole child and to structure experiences around that view. Such an approach not only develops skills but provides experiential learning. In secondary schools, the pressure for academic attainment is so great that it is hard for subject teachers to let go and to allow children to have experiences of the sort that I have mentioned. Community events, charity fund raising and outdoor education experiences still take place, but they are less frequent. Understandably, teachers are becoming more reluctant to take part in such events as add-ons to their contractual requirements. Through a range of other professionals, we must provide teachers with the

support that will complement their work to give children a range of experiences.

Support from the New Opportunities Fund for out-of-school-hours learning is proving extremely successful. It is right that such funding should be targeted at social inclusion partnership areas, but children in all areas need the experiences that I have described. Another problem is that funding is usually limited to three years. What happens in the long term? We are able to experiment and are doing things, but people need the confidence of knowing that resources will be available in the long term.

Malcolm MacKenzie: One of Gordon Jeyes's most significant comments is that there is too much emphasis on systems and structures. My questions are specifically directed at management. I feel that we are being pushed more and more down the road to a systems approach to management. That can be seen in the chartered teacher programme for Scotland, the Scottish qualifications for headship programme, the school effectiveness movement and the Government's emphasis on targets and outputs. Once again, we are being pushed towards a form of management thought that was popular before the first world war. How do you resist such an emphasis on systems and structures?

Gordon Jeyes: I defer to your memory of the first world war, Malcolm. From the way you began your question, I am curious as to whether I am being accused of being management. It almost sounds like a term from the 1970s.

Malcolm MacKenzie: From me, it is praise.

Gordon Jeyes: Well, I do not take it as such. As far as my own area of responsibility is concerned, I do not manage schools but try to streamline the agenda for them and provide some leadership within which they can thrive. I try to challenge schools where necessary and support them in proportion to their needs.

Although much good has come out of the school effectiveness or school standards agenda, I largely agree with your comments. That said, there is a too ready temptation, particularly from those of us who are remote, to interfere with processes and say, "We know the solution". Honestly, we are not bad people. If we knew the solution to raising achievement in areas of deprivation or elsewhere, we would be implementing it. As there is no systemic or structural solution, we have to back off from the tick-box mentality. It is entirely good that we are having a debate around the five agreed national priorities. However—and this is a personal view rather than the association's opinion—I am wary of the notion that we should prescribe how we measure things within those priorities. I do not understand for one minute how deciding a dozen key indicators for self-evaluation that all schools fill out and then adding those up tells us anything. It tells us nothing, apart from the fact that teachers have spent a lot of good time filling in a self-evaluation questionnaire. We have to get back to doing what is good enough in the interests of all children instead of searching for a system of excellence that does not exist. That means that we have to trust teachers' judgment.

That said, teachers have to want to be trusted. In the recent agreement on conditions of service, the management side threw down the gauntlet. We have taken greater risks with that agreement because we want to emphasise a professional approach to these matters, which will lead to diversity and greater creativity. That will come through cultural change.

SQH will not provide us with a head teacher template. We have done that before through competence systems that, because of the tick-box mentality, tend to be based on the assumption that they will lead to the best deputy head teacher possible. However, after we make those deputy head teachers head teachers, we ask where the vision and leadership in schools have gone. The truth is that we have drummed such qualities out of people or indeed have recruited the wrong people, because we were not prepared to accept mavericks or people who spoke out. The situation with the chartered teacher programme is a little bit more complex, and could still be rescued.

Shelagh Rae: Gordon Jeyes has already said most of what I was going to say. All I would add is that we must examine how we evaluate quality of leadership. If we have a tick-box mentality about professional evaluation, inspections of schools and so on, we will generate a consensus on all the qualities that make a person a good leader. Of course, that consensus might be wrong. As Gordon says, sometimes a good leader is someone who marches to the beat of a different drum. If we send out a message that we value a set of clearly defined qualities, people will try to accommodate themselves to those criteria because they think that, by doing so, they will be recognised and valued. It is about how we reward and praise as well as what development work we do.

Gordon Jeyes: I wish to point out that as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education has not yet been to Renfrewshire or Stirling, we do not have our smiley face. I am sure that its tick boxes are admirable and we look forward to being judged on that basis.

The Deputy Convener: You are hopeful about your smiley faces.

Gordon Jeyes: I would work hard at all times to get a smiley face.

16:45

Ian Jenkins: I am delighted that the setting in which we are having the debate will mean that we might be able to change something about the philosophy. I have been against the tick-box way of working for so long that I am delighted to hear people express that view out loud and not to be afraid of saying it with the inspectors listening.

What do you consider to be the mechanism for moving on from the present position? How will we implement a change of ethos and philosophy? What steps will we need to go through to free ourselves from some of the constraints?

Shelagh Rae: The kind of debate that the committee is having on the purposes of education and on what you hope that we will achieve is important. It is important to consider how to provide the necessary scrutiny, because we must ensure that children receive similar standards of education, wherever they are educated. It is not necessary for them to receive an identical education, but the standards must be similar. That kind of rigour is important.

If the purposes of education should be broadly defined, so should the outcomes against which we measure accountability, whether at the level of individual schools, at council level or throughout Scotland. Those outcomes are broad and a rigour and a focus should be applied to them. There should also be a trust. Looking back a generation to the period when I came into teaching, insufficient scrutiny meant that there was probably not enough consistency. As always happens in such cases, the pendulum has swung too far the other way and we must bring it back.

We must obtain a balance in the system. There must be sufficient accountability and rigour to enable us to stand up with honesty and to say to all the people in Scotland that they will get a good quality of education, regardless of where they live. At the same time, we must give confidence to teachers and the other professionals who work with children and young people by saying, "We trust you to do a good job." In my experience, the vast majority of people are not in education to do a bad job.

Gordon Jeyes: I have a couple of points to add. First, in achieving those aims, we must ensure that there is still rigour. I will give an example to balance the picture. I find it surprising that we are still stuttering around trying to find a reliable and valid assessment system in primary schools. We do not have such a system. The fact that the information that is generated is not always comparable for internal purposes causes difficulties. We need to have rigorous data; we are not arguing for all the quality information to be thrown out—far from it.

Secondly, raising and nurturing a child takes a whole community. Policy makers, educational leaders and politicians must find the right language to work with families or those who surrogate for families. There is no better way of raising a child. If we wish to enhance a child's learning, the formal part of the education process—the school—must work fully in partnership. In one sense, that is another cliché. We must explore fully what it means to work in partnership, so that we can play a full part for those children whom we should applaud daily for getting to school, given the circumstances of abuse or neglect or the chaotic lifestyles from which they come. We must also explore how to support those families in a non-patronising way.

There are other issues for society that are not about poverty. Some of those issues are to do with affluence and working parents, which can present difficult circumstances for the lifestyles of children. The emphasis on the consumer has given rise to attitudes about the state being expected to manage and organise a child's upbringing from child care through to their educational experience.

We are trying to change the culture within which such matters are discussed and we must make it somewhat less intense if we are to encourage diversity. There must still be accountability, but it must be to the local community in the context of what parents and students expect. We have come back to the issue of democracy and having the confidence to have the conversation.

I do not want to be repetitive, but teaching is about values, relationships and attitudes. Given the pace of change, we need to think about those values a bit more. It is difficult to offer a system that is based on leadership rather than on management. Discussing rather than specifying how devolved resources for support staff should be spent is difficult. We allocate the money and we want certain outcomes to be achieved in the interests of the most vulnerable children.

I do not know what the education structure should be for the 21st century, but I want to debate it with you. I am not providing the solutions. It would be as wrong for me to do that even for the group of schools in Stirling as it would be for Edinburgh to dictate what happens. A system that is based on leadership rather than on management is more difficult; it is painful and harder and takes longer, but it will be worth while in the end.

The Deputy Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank Shelagh Rae and Gordon Jeyes very much.

Meeting closed at 16:51.

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